

Interview with Sheldon Vance

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR SHELDON VANCE

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Q: I will be having the privilege of interviewing Ambassador Sheldon Vance, who was twice ambassador, once to Chad and once to Zaire. Ambassador Vance, you entered the Foreign Service in 1942. Could you tell us what about the Foreign Service interested you enough to make it a career?

VANCE: I attended Carlton College in Northfield, Minnesota, from 1935 to 1939. Shortly before I went to Carlton, Frank Kellogg, former Secretary of State, and a Minnesotan, died and left a large part of his fortune to Carlton to establish the Kellogg Foundation for the Study of International Relations. I did not major in that department, but I took many courses and became very interested in foreign affairs. Indeed, I wrote a weekly column for the Carltonian, the college newspaper, on foreign affairs.

In 1939, my mother and I went on a trip to Europe, which sometimes followed a college graduation, and we visited most of the countries of Western Europe, including then Nazi Germany. I happened to be in Nuremberg, attended the last Nazi Congress in Nuremberg. We were in Naples when I read of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and I told my mother, "We'd better get out of Mussolini's Italy fast." So we did, and we were in Nice, France, when Britain and

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France went to war with Germany, and were evacuated. We went home on a ship sent to a little fishing port near Bordeaux. So that sort of initiated me into foreign affairs.

Q: Having entered the Foreign Service, you spent a fair amount of your career involved in what was then the Belgian Congo, later Zaire. You first presumably were initiated to Congolese affairs when you became country desk officer for Belgium in 1951. Was there much interest at that time in the then Congo in the Department of State?

VANCE: Not a great deal, but the fact that the Congo was a very huge country and enormously rich potentially in raw materials interested it mightily to form Belgium to the Belgians. Therefore, I began to learn something about the Congo, although the affairs of the colonies in Africa were then handled by the Bureau of Middle East, South Asian, and African Affairs, rather than the Bureau of European Affairs, where I was. But nonetheless, I began to be exposed to it.

Then having been transferred from Washington to Brussels, where I became chief of the political section in 1954, I had that position from 1954 to 1958. In the very beginning of 1958, I visited the Belgian Congo and Rwanda and Burundi as the aide and translator and advisor to our then ambassador to Belgium, Clifford Folger. We spent five weeks touring the three colonies. That resulted in my really being bitten by the Africanist bug. I was fascinated by what I saw.

Q: What were your chief impressions during that visit?

VANCE: There was a very paternalistic policy on the part of the Belgians. The then Governor General briefed the ambassador and me when we arrived in Leopoldville the very first days of January 1958. He explained to us that the Belgian policy was that they were going to wait to give self-government to the Congolese until they had educated a very large percentage of the population, in order, said he, to avoid the mistake that had been made, in their opinion, by the British and the French and the Portuguese, who had educated a small elite, then at independence, which had already begun in the early sixties,

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a dictatorship of the small elite. They were going to avoid that. So here he was talking to us in January 1958, and saying that Belgium would be there as the colonial power for a number of years.

They had just had the first very minor elections about a month before we arrived, in about eight or ten communes or sections of major cities. A gentleman by the name of [Joseph] Kasavubu had been elected burgermeister of one of the communes. When I discovered that the Belgian hosts did not intend for the ambassador to meet any Congolese, I advised the ambassador, and he insisted that he meet the elected burgermeisters of the Leopoldville area. I therefore met the gentleman who later became the first president of the Congo, Mr. Kasavubu. That was the last encounter that the ambassador or I had with the Congolese, other than as servants, during the remaining five weeks of our visit.

Q: Your time both as desk officer in Washington and your position as chief of the political section in the embassy at Brussels spanned a period of time when U.S. policy towards evolving Africa was being developed. One of the things that a great deal was made of was the fact that the United States had not been a colonial power, as opposed to European countries. At what point in time did you begin to detect a definite individual policy on the part of the United States towards the evolving African countries?

VANCE: It was developing very slowly. I think one of the reasons was that we had a relatively small number of Foreign Service officers stationed in colonial Africa, and also Africa was part of the Middle East and South Asian bureau. That, I think, tended to give a lower priority, I believe, in the minds of senior officials in our government because of the tinderbox type of situation that has been in the Middle East for many years. I didn't detect a great deal of interest in what Ambassador Folger and I had seen and learned in the Congo on the part of the Department of State after we returned to Brussels.

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Q: There was a school of thought, if I remember correctly, at that time that the United States tended to support the European colonial powers as a general thesis. Would you call that valid?

VANCE: I believe there was a certain amount of validity to it. I think the United States was in favor of stability and careful transition so that wild-eyed revolutionaries, communists, would not ensconce themselves in the former African colonies.

Q: After Brussels, you came back to the Department in a personnel job, and therefore you were not immediately involved in the independence of Zaire. But you certainly inherited it in your first job, after Zaire became independent, as Director of the Office of Central African Affairs. When you became Director of the Office of Central African Affairs, did you inherit a policy? Did you begin to develop a policy? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

VANCE: It was during my service in personnel when the African Bureau became independent, although during the remainder of my service in personnel, I continued to handle African assignments, although the African Bureau had become independent.

I then moved from personnel to be a student at the Foreign Service Institute in Senior Seminar, and this was from September of 1960 to right after the independence of the Congo on June 30, 1960, until the following May or June, a nine-month academic-type assignment. In that seminar, it was then policy—and I believe still is—for the 25 or 30 students from the full variety of U.S. federal government agencies which deal in foreign affairs, to choose a subject for a research paper. They were asked to choose a subject on a part of the world they had not previously been exposed to.

I was giving some thought, around the first of December of 1960, to choosing a subject related to Asia, when I had two popped discs and underwent major surgery, and was forbidden to envisage any world travels. Therefore, I tried to choose something that I had

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some background in, so that I wouldn't be totally without firsthand experience in the area that I chose, but one where I had not actually been assigned.

I chose the newly independent Congo, which, two or three weeks after its independence, had fallen completely apart largely due to the Belgian policy of not giving education to the Congolese. We estimated at the time that there were about 16 million Congolese, and that there were about 12 Congolese university graduates and 2,000 or 3,000 high school graduates.

Another part of Belgian policy prior to about 1959 was that they did not allow Congolese to occupy positions of officer equivalence, not only in the armed services and police, but in private sector. The most that a Congolese could rise to in, for example, the mining operations, was to run a locomotive on the railroads or a steam shovel.

Therefore, when independence came, all of the officers in the Congolese Army were Belgian, and the soldiers could not understand why, after independence, they had to continue to take orders from the Belgians. So the Congolese Army revolted two or three weeks after independence, and very shortly after that, the then Governor of Katanga Province, where all the copper and cobalt mines are located, declared that he had seceded from this disaster up in Leopoldville, and he was aided and abetted by the then Congolese mining company, the Union Miniere [de Haut Katanga], and the same thing happened in Kasai, where the sister company, MIBA, helped the then head of the Kasai Baluba tribe, the M(inaudible), or the emperor of the Kasai tribal peoples, to secede also, because there were diamond mines. So the two provinces that produced all of the foreign exchange earnings of the Congo had seceded.

During the course of that year, that first 12 months while I was in the Senior Seminar, the central government fell apart. Kasabuvu had been elected president and [Patrice] Lumumba had been elected the prime minister. The two of them had had a falling-out, each firing the other, and Lumumba was accused of being a communist leader and

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was finally arrested on Kasabuvu's orders by [Joseph-D#sir#] Mobutu, who had been a sergeant in the Congolese Colonial Army, had been promoted to colonel and commander-in-chief of the Congolese Army by Kasabuvu.

There Lumumba had his hands, and he wondered where it would be safe to put him in prison. He and the president decided that it would be safer to ship him off to safekeeping in Katanga at the hands of [Moise] Tshombe, who certainly did not like communists or Lumumba. They shipped him off there. Tshombe either personally executed him or had him executed.

But Lumumba's number two, Gazinga, had managed to escape Mobutu, and made it to Stanleyville, where he declared that he, being the vice prime minister chosen by the Parliament after Lumumba's death, had become the prime minister and the legitimate governor of the Congo.

So we had two central governments of a country, its two provinces that supplied all of the foreign exchange earnings of the country having seceded. So I had a lot of interesting problems to write about. I went over to the new African Bureau, which had just been headed, under President Kennedy, by former Governor of Michigan, "Soapy" Williams, and "Soapy" was not very well acquainted with Africa, to put it mildly, and brought in Wayne Fredericks, who had been the Ford Foundation man in charge of their African efforts. Wayne Fredericks was the number two.

I spent a great deal of time over in the African Bureau talking to officers who had been following the Congo and developments in great detail, because I was not able to travel out there for medical reasons. I wrote my paper with their help, first analyzing the background of what had happened, and then suggesting what the United States should try to do to resolve the problems of this disaster. As I say, to a considerable extent it was a product of the officers in the bureau who had been working on the Congo, but also my own thoughts.

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In summary, it was that we should do our best to restore the Congo to its original hold, and the means to that end would be to reassemble the Parliament that had been dissolved when Lumumba and Kasavubu each dismissed the other. Then Kasavubu dismissed the Parliament. We should also endeavor to persuade Tshombe and the Kasai leader to stop this secession and return to the central government if we could get Gazinga to back off.

Also in view of the fact that there had been a total disintegration of government and law and order, we recommended that the United Nations be asked to supply experts to assist the Congolese in running their government and provide troops from countries other than major powers to provide law and order.

Governor "Soapy" Williams thought our paper was so good, he asked if I would come to the bureau after graduation from the Senior Seminar, and he would create an office, the Office of Central African Affairs, charged with only trying to cope with the Congo and the two adjacent Belgian colonies, which were about to become independent, Rwanda and Burundi. That launched me in African affairs.

We did our best to persuade the Kasai leader and Tshombe to abandon their secession and to send their representatives to Parliament, which was reconvened. The U.N. send troops which were spread pretty much all over the Congo, and the U.N. offered, when Kasavubu recalled Parliament, to guarantee the safety of all the members of Parliament, and even to send aircraft out to bring them into Leopoldville.

The Parliament was finally reassembled at Louvanium University, which had been opened by the Belgian Government only about two years before, as an offshoot of the great Belgium ancient University of Louvain. Louvanium was located on a rise of land above the Congo River at the outskirts of Leopoldville, and the U.N. provided a full battalion of Nigerian troops, in which all sides appeared to have confidence to assure their safety while they were meeting there. Bob Eisenberg, who had been in the bureau before the creation of AFC, had been working on Congo affairs, had become my deputy, and we sent Bob

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out to Elisabethville to try to persuade Tshombe to send his representatives to Louvanium. Bob thought that that had been arranged. Regrettably, it fell apart because Tshombe couldn't believe himself to believe that he would be safe if he went up to Leopoldville and put himself in the hands of Kasavubu and Mobutu. He didn't come.

The people from Kasai did come. Gazinga sent his people, but himself, a member of Parliament, did not come down, and all of the remaining members of the lower house of the Congolese Parliament disappeared behind the troops up at Louvanium. The first signal we got from the embassy was that a Gazingist had been elected as Speaker of the Chamber.

I was then summoned to Secretary [Dean] Rusk's office to be asked by the Secretary how sure we were that Gazinga would not be chosen prime minister, and that this was a bad sign. Being eternally optimistic, I said that our repeated head counts showed that he would not be. Kasavubu, under the constitution, was the only person authorized to nominate he prime minister, and he had assured us that he was going to nominate Cyrille Adoula, who was a moderate Belgian-style socialist, and our head count showed that if nominated, Adoula would win. Kasavubu was certainly not going to nominate Gazinga.

There was some thought in higher reaches of the Department of State at this point that maybe the African Bureau, particularly the Central African Affairs office, was perhaps a little naive. There were some suggestions that it might even resemble our Cuban experts on the eve of the Castro revolution or our China experts on the eve of Mao taking over in China.

A telegram was sent out to get the views of our ambassador there, Ed Gullion, in Leopoldville, and he fired back assurance that he was confident that we would emerge successful. So the inclination to ask Kasavubu to call the affair off dropped, and Adoula was indeed nominated and he became prime minister. This was in the fall of 1961.

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President Kennedy had taken a great personal interest in the affairs of the Congo and the crisis. It was a crisis big enough to come to his attention, and he, I think, was anxious to overcome what had proved to be a bad mistake when he had continued the Cuban effort, the Bay of Pigs. So he was following the matter very, very closely, and he would frequently have “Soapy” Williams over to the White House to brief him on what was happening. “Soapy” would bring me along with him. The President's interest was so profound that sometimes his questions would exceed the details that his assistant secretary would have, and so I would engage in a dialogue with the President, which was really exciting.

On two different occasions, my secretary came into my office and said, with her eyes bugging, that the President of the United States was on the line and wanted to talk to me. I would salute, stand up, and pick up the telephone. He'd say, “I just read in the newspapers (or heard on the radio) such and such. That does not jive with what you've been telling me.” Then I would have to explain what was going on. He would say, “Very well. Keep it up.” Finally, President Kennedy decided that e was so thrilled with his success.

I should back up just a bit. I said earlier that Gazinga had not come down to attend the meeting a Louvanium, which had undercut his strength at the Louvanium Parliament because he had shown cowardice. But he continued to sit up in Stanleyville and make trouble. His r#gime was recognized by left-wing governments throughout Africa and by the Soviet Bloc. Here public and congressional criticism began to erupt from the conservative elements in the press and the Congress, wondering why in the world the United States Government was supporting a central government which was headed by a socialist, of all parties, and was unable to do anything effective with Gazinga, who was an admitted communist.

Senator Thomas Dodd held a press conference just as the Congress was dissolving for the Christmas recess, and said that as soon as he returned, his American Affairs subcommittee, Pan American Affairs, I think it was called, would hold a hearing to try to determine what in the world was going on down in the State Department. In reply to a

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question as to if he had any dubious, questionable personages in mind, he named two or three, and my name was at the top of the list.

The Secretary of State immediately informed the press that everything that was being done by his department had his approval, and that if there was such a hearing, he would be the first witness and he would assure the committee that he had full confidence in his staff.

The committee meeting opened on January 18, which, coincidentally, is my birthday. I was able to walk into the committee room with the Washington Post in hand, the headline of which said, "Gazinga Arrested by Adoula." So I escaped that horrendous hearing.

We thus got rid of Gazinga, we resolved the Kasai matter, and Tshombe continued to be a problem. As I indicated earlier, certain conservative elements in the United States were very curious as to why, as someone put it, "we were being beastly to this anti-communist, Christian Tshombe." Several people, in particular Senator Dodd, were particularly critical of our stand. They organized the Katanga lobby and, to our horror, they organized a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden—I can't remember exactly when—in the spring of 1962, where the Katanga lobby was going to hold a mass meeting, and they invited Tshombe to come to address this mass meeting.

A parallel development was that President Kennedy was so proud of his success in the Congo, that he invited Prime Minister Adoula to make an official visit to the United States. On the very day that Kennedy was having Adoula for lunch in the White House, a luncheon which I attended as possible translator-advisor to Assistant Secretary Williams, I learned just before going to the White House for that luncheon, that the Tshombe application for a visa to come to the Madison Square Garden meeting, which the African Bureau had, we thought, arranged for it to be refused, had been overturned. The African Bureau's decision had been overturned by the Secretary's officer, or the seventh floor,

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at least, quite possibly by Under Secretary George McGhee, who had not been very favorable up to that point of our Congo policy.

In any case, there I was in the White House with the President of the United States and Prime Minister Adoula. When Adoula went to leave the White House after the lunch, Kennedy escorted him. "Soapy" Williams went with them. Because Adoula did not speak English and neither of them spoke French, I went along. So I was present when the President put Adoula in the automobile and he drove off. "Soapy" stood on the front stoop of the White House, them talking to each other, people passing on the sidewalk shouted and waved at the President, and he waved back. I stood there knowing that the President did not know that that afternoon the press would probably learn that a visa had been issued to Tshombe.

I mustered my courage, all three hands, and went up to the two gentlemen and said, "Mr. President, something happened this morning that I think you should know about." And I told him that the decision had been made in the Department that morning to issue Tshombe a visa, the very day that he had been entertaining Adoula at the White House.

Kennedy exploded, and he asked "Soapy" Williams how in the world that could happen. "Soapy" started muttering about pressure from the Hill, and Kennedy's long finger was poking "Soapy" in the chest, and he said, "That's why we've got you in the State Department to handle matters like this. Get yourself back to the State Department and stop this nonsense!" Whereupon "Soapy" ran off, the President went back to the White House, I withdrew with my tail between my legs, wondering what horror was going to befall me for appealing to the President of the United States over at least the Under Secretary of State and not the Secretary of State.

All heck did break out. I was suspended as office director. Management of our Congo policy was removed from the African Bureau and lodged personally in the hands of George

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McGhee, and I walked the halls for a couple of weeks, wondering if I would ever get another assignment.

After, I think, two or three weeks of what we call in the Foreign Service “walking the halls,” without any assignment, my pay was not suspended, fortunately, but I had no office to sit in, no job to report to.

Finally, I was rescued by people at management, by the Director of Personnel, who gave me an office and worked out an assignment for me that was acceptable to all concerned, and that happened to be the Deputy Chief of Mission position in Addis Ababa, which had suddenly become open due to the incumbent Fred Hadsel, who had been on home leave, finding in the course of his regular medical examination that he had a shadow on his lung, which, fortunately, proved not to be important, but which prevented his returning to Addis Ababa. There was urgency in replacing him, because Vice President [Hubert] Humphrey, on a recent tour of Africa, had formed a very strong dislike for Arthur Richards, who was then our ambassador to Ethiopia, and insisted to the President and the Secretary of State that he be replaced. He was about to be removed under those circumstances, so he needed a deputy in a hurry.

So my wife, Jean, and I were shipped out to Addis Ababa in a great hurry, and I'd been assured before I left the Department that Art Richards would be informed before I arrived, of his imminent transfer. He met me at the airport, which is rather unusual for an ambassador, even for his deputy, and said he had done so because he was impressed by the rapidity with which Fred Hadsel had been replaced by my arrival. (Laughs) He wondered what was up. He obviously had not heard. I told him on the drive back into the city from the airport what was imminent. That, of course, was not very pleasant news for him to learn. He left about ten day after I arrived, and I became charg# d'affaires, which is a little more important than being charg# between absences of an ambassador. This was between ambassadors, and this period went on for about five or six months before Ed Korry was named ambassador.

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Q: Before we get into Ethiopia, I would like to go back again to your experience as Director of African Affairs. As you so clearly indicated, the then Congo developed into a very high profile of concern on the part of the Kennedy Administration, going on up to the President himself. There were a variety of players in the act, including "Soapy" Williams, as you mentioned, and McGhee. Who was basically calling the shots as far as our Congo policy was concerned at the time? What were some of the differences of opinion, even in the Department of State, between such organizations as the African Bureau, the European Bureau, and perhaps even our embassies in Kinshasa, or Leopoldville, at the time, and Brussels?

VANCE: There certainly were differences. The battles were long and all but bloody. Our then ambassador to Brussels was Douglas MacArthur II, and he bombarded the Department with two- and three-section telegrams containing the advice and points of view of the Belgian Government which differed very sharply from ours, especially in the way that we were badgering that great conservative statesman Moise Tshombe.

The European Bureau spokesman was Bill Burdett, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and had been assigned the Congo problem by his assistant secretary. Then the Office of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, known in the Department as IO at the time, was very pleased with what was going on in the Congo, because the U.N. was, in effect, managing the Congo with its experts and maintaining law and order with its troops.

So the battles would be joined every time an instruction telegram went out to our embassy in Leopoldville. It had to be cleared by IO and EUR, and very often IO would almost always agree with AF's point of view, and EUR would almost always disagree. Then, therefore, when bureaus disagree, the matter is appealed upwards for resolution. The next step is the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who was at the time George McGhee, who tended, on the whole, to favor the views of EUR, but not always. Then if we lost at that

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level, we would appeal it to the next step, which was to George Ball, who usually came down on AF's side. Very rarely did it reach the Secretary's level.

Ed Gullion, who was our ambassador at the time in Leopoldville, was strongly supportive. We and he saw eye to eye on what should be done and what shouldn't be done. As I say, Ambassador MacArthur usually differed.

Q: When you were in AFC, the U.N. had sent peacekeeping troops to the Congo. But in the U.N. itself, as I think you've already hinted, there was a considerable difference of opinion as to the value or the desirability of becoming involved in Zaire. Could you comment on that and your feelings or thoughts about our own relations with the U.N. presence in Zaire?

VANCE: The first U.N. manager, or director—I've forgotten his title—of the U.N. program in Zaire was an Indian by the name of Dewal. Regrettably, we thought in the AF Bureau that he tended to favor the Gazingist types. So we raised such a considerable fuss with the U.N. that he was transferred and replaced by a gentleman from Ghana, who was Bob Gardner. We got along very well with Bob Gardner, and we continued to do our best to bring Tshombe around. But he continued to resist all efforts, and when we'd get him in a corner, he'd agree, and then as soon as he found a way out of the corner, he would disagree.

There was fighting going on between U.N. forces in Katanga, and Tshombe's gendarmes, were officered and equipped by Belgian mercenaries and mercenaries from other countries, including South Africa. Just as the U.N. forces would get him in a corner and he would appear having to give in, he would appeal to the U.S. Government. A couple of times he asked President Kennedy, one time in particular, to arrange a truce negotiation. Well, we couldn't say no, so he agreed, and there was a truce. Tshombe flew up on a U.N. escort into a site down towards the mouth of the Congo River, and there it appeared that

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there was going to be a settlement, but as soon as he got back to #lisabethville, he backed down.

After I had gone on to Ethiopia, I learned that the U.N. had finally stopped listening to the United States' urging to hold back and not rough up Mr. Tshombe, and Bob Gardner and the then Indian commanding general just kept marching on Tshombe, and finally forced him into exile in Spain. A great noise erupted at the U.N., and the U.S. was furious that they'd told U Thant to order the U.N. troops to stop marching on Tshombe, and they hadn't stopped. The Secretary General of the U.N. at the time was U Thant. His predecessor, Dag Hammarskjold, had been killed in an airplane crash when he was flying out to #lisabethville, in order to try once again to persuade Tshombe to give up his secession.

In this case, Bob Gardner arrived in Addis Ababa, where I was then stationed, to take charge of the Economic Commission for Africa under the U.N., because he had taken care of Tshombe, and the Congo was reunited. Therefore, the U.N. operation could wind down. So as soon as I had a chance, I asked Bob Gardner what in the world had happened. He told me that the commander of the Indian troops in the U.N. forces there, had decided that Tshombe just had to go. He said, "I knew that the United States Government would scream and holler if we got rough with Tshombe, so I just, in effect, turned off my hearing device. We just did it."

U Thant flew out to Leopoldville to find out what had happened, a breakdown in communication or a rebellion in the U.N. against his instructions, that he had assured the United States that he had ordered the U.N. troops to stop. Bob Gardner told me he went to the airport to meet U Thant. As soon as U Thant got in his car and they drove away from the crowd that had been out to welcome him, U Thant embraced him and said, "That was a fine job you did, Bob. Thank the Lord that one's over."

The other amusing story about Tshombe's visa that I omitted earlier is that one of the loudest voices complaining about the United States' refusal of a visa to Tshombe was

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that of Arthur Crock, that great sunderer of the press, repeatedly expressed horror in his column. But shortly after the refusal of the visa, t the annual Gridiron dinner, at which the President and other notables are roasted, as the press says, but then they are given a chance to reply, and JFK stood up to reply, and he said, "I see my good friend Arthur Crock in the audience. Arthur, I'll make a deal with you. I'll give Tshombe a visa if you'll invite him for lunch at the Metropolitan Club." This was back in the days when blacks were not admitted to the Metropolitan Club, and Arthur Clock was a frequenter at a prominent table at that club each noon. We never heard another peep from Arthur Crock about Tshombe.

Q: When you look at the Congo as it was in 1960, in terms of United States interests, narrowly speaking, we had some missionaries there, we were interested in minerals production, copper, uranium, manganese, cobalt. We were also generally interested, I guess you could fairly say, in the decolonization process in Africa. What, in your judgment, triggered such high-level interest in the Congo in those days? Looking back now, would you say that the development of our policy in those very same days was relatively successful?

VANCE: I think that our high-level interest was, as I began to suggest earlier, due to the personality of President John F. Kennedy and his great interest in foreign affairs and his great embarrassment that his first foreign affairs effort had been such a disaster. He continued the effort that had been planned to help the Cuban anti-Castroites land in Cuba, a program that had been planned just before he became President, but with which he went along. It was, as we all know, a disaster. Vietnam was beginning to become important, but had not yet assumed major importance. It was still largely a French problem for the relatively brief period we're talking about in history.

So our policy, which favored the restoration of the Congo's original colonial geographic boundaries, was indicated in our mind, in the African bureau, by the fact that boundaries of almost every African state had been drawn in the colonial period, depending upon

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where the troops and explorers and the related representatives of the colonial powers were at the time, without any regard to tribal or ethnic boundaries, and very little regard to economic sense. We recognized that, but as every country in Africa, most of which by that time were newly independent, had that weakness, we believed, as indeed the Africans themselves did, at one of their early meetings of the Organization of African Unity at Addis Ababa, they all agreed that this was the situation, but if one country tried to take a piece of neighboring country for tribal or ethnic reasons, then all of Africa would disintegrate into chaos. Therefore, they all agreed that present inherited boundaries would be recognized and there would be only peaceful efforts, if any, to correct them.

Also the United States' African policy favored the larger countries, because we saw that the disintegration of the former French colonial structure to many small independent countries, most of which were economically inevitable, that was going to provide for a lot of instability in the future, and that the larger the structure, the more economically viable it would be. We believed that the Congo, with its boundaries as drawn during the colonial period, was an economically viable unit if its leaders could bring its people to regard themselves as Congolese, rather than members of each of the tribes. That, I think, is basically what finally happened in the history of the Congo between the time I've just discussed and four or five years later, was one of great unrest and instability, when they were trying to overcome their tribal differences.

There was a major tribal rebellion of the Swahili Simbas, which seized for a time a good part of eastern Zaire, of eastern Congo, and finally took Stanleyville, and there seized the houses and the U.S. consulate in Stanleyville and a great many Belgian private citizens and advisors and teachers.

Eventually, the Simba rebellion was overcome and Mobutu seized power, and his rebellion put the Army in control. There certainly has not been a great deal of what we call democracy, but at least it began to make a country and to make most of its inhabitants think of themselves as Congolese or, today, Zairians.

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Q: Let me interrupt you for a moment, because I want to take you into your time as Ambassador in Zaire, which began in 1969, skipping over the period of time when you were DCM in Addis, followed by your first ambassadorship in Chad, then a tour for a year as Foreign Service inspector. You also did a side job as African Affairs advisors to the U.N. General Assembly in 1968.

In 1969, you became ambassador to Zaire, and you lasted in that job well over four years, which is something of a record in terms of ambassadorial appointments. When you arrived in 1969, the cast of characters had changed. Mobutu was already president. Territorial integrity had been preserved. What were the problems you inherited then? What are your feelings about what came after you arrived in the subsequent years?

VANCE: One of the first problems we faced after I arrived was what to do about Mobutu's nationalization of the Union Miniere. When Mobutu seized power in his coup of November of 1965, one of the first things he did was to nationalize the Union Miniere. We could recognize that that was an understandable human reaction, because the Union Miniere, as I indicated earlier, had helped Tshombe and encouraged Tshombe to mount his secession.

Q: Union Miniere was the giant Belgium-based mining company in Katanga.

VANCE: A huge subsidiary, but nonetheless a subsidiary, of the Soci#t# Generale, which was as powerful in many respects as the government in Belgium. An amusing footnote is that the Place Royale in Brussels has, as a rectangular park, four sides, at one end is the royal palace. At the other end is Parliament, the opposite end. Then of the two sides, on one side there's the Soci#t# Generale headquarters, and on the other side is the U.S. Embassy. People would giggle about the juxtaposition of the relative powers in Belgium.

The Union Miniere had been nationalized by Mobutu, and the Congolese simply did not have the trained manpower that it took to manage a huge mining operation of that nature.

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Obviously, they could have turned to other countries to recruit leadership, but we believed that notwithstanding the love-hate relationship which always exists between a former colony and a former metropolitan government, that the people of the former metropolitan country are much more likely to be successful, or be willing to come out in sufficient numbers and go into the distant corners of the former colony and do what has to be done.

So we certainly did not, although some Belgians criticized the United States' intent to try to "steal" the Congo from them during this earlier period that we've been talking about that I was in the AFC, but we kept assuring our Belgian friends, many of whom I knew personally from service in Belgium, that all we were trying to do was to take the albatross of neo-colonialism, a term which was invented by the press to describe what certain Belgians were doing in the Congo, off their backs so they could play their appropriate role.

So we recommended to Mobutu that he strike a deal with a Belgian company, and not inquire too deeply into how it used the proceeds of its management of former Union Miniere property, because being a corporation related to Societe Generale, quite possibly some of these funds would find their way to former Union Miniere shareholders. That would take the curse off the nationalization. Nothing is more injurious to a developing country's reputation amongst foreign corporate investors than a major nationalization. We thought that we saw that the Congo should get correct its reputation by making such an arrangement. They did.

Mobutu did gulp a couple of times and make an issue to agree to a management contract with a company called General Mining Company, in English, which brought Belgian operatives in and has been a successful operation ever since.

We also, at the same time, helped the Congolese Government revise their initial investment code to govern foreign investments, because we thought that the potential wealth of the Congo could be developed more rapidly, not only if the Belgian private-sector position was restored, but if other countries' private sectors, particularly that of the United

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States, could be encouraged to go there. We did that. Our Department of Commerce spread that word around.

Very shortly, about less than a year after I arrived, we were able to arrange an official visit by Mobutu to the United States, and we urged him and our government to use this occasion to encourage U.S. private sector to see the opportunities for foreign investment in the Congo. This, indeed, happened. Pan American built the first international hotel, the Intercontinental Hotel, and got the management contract for Air Zaire. Meanwhile, Mobutu had changed the name from the Congo to Zaire. City Bank opened a branch. A major grain company opened a flour mill in Matadi, and General Motors and Goodyear Tire both opened plants in Kinshasa. There was a considerable American private sector.

The Congolese economy, because of the very high, excellent prices obtained for its raw materials like copper, cobalt, uranium, and diamonds, its economy was so successful that we moved Zaire from grant assistance to loan assistance in this period. Eventually, shortly before I left, at the beginning of the collapse of the economies of most of the developing world, which were the direct outcome of the formation of OPEC and the incredible driving up of oil prices, which destroyed the economies of most of the developing world that didn't have its own oil supply, and damaged even the developed world, in my opinion, and was not favorable in the long run, even for the major oil producers.

I haven't been able to understand why we appeared to, in some ways, support the creation of OPEC; we should have done everything possible to prevent its creation.

I think that on the whole, most Congolese now, education is widespread, there's free public education, there are many thousands of Congolese university graduates.

Incidentally, our gift at independence to the Congo—I've forgotten the number, but several hundred university full fellowships. We found that once they had been chosen carefully,

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they still had to be put through a year or, in some cases, two years of preparatory training in the United States before they could cope with university studies.

I think, on the whole, as I look back on our policy toward Zaire with regard to Mobutu, it wasn't all that bad. He certainly is not perfect, but I think Zaire could have, and still could, do much worse.

Q: Mobutu, of course, is still president of Zaire. His relations with our chiefs of mission have been rocky at times. They were not during your time. I'd be interested in hearing your judgments about Mobutu himself and what it was that you were able to accomplish in terms of personal relationships that led eventually to your receiving a decoration at the time you left, the Order of Leopard.

VANCE: I think that I was able to develop a special relationship with Mobutu because he knew of my considerable background in Congolese affairs and of the helpful role I had played in previous assignments. We got along very well. I saw him often alone. Some of the things that I endeavored to advise him on were not successful. For example, I saw that foreign investors were coming in.

One of the foreign imports that I feared would become all too acceptable and received in a developing country was the question of corruption. I tried to explain to Mobutu that he should do his best to strongly discourage this on the part of his subordinates, because I pointed out that he should be interested in having the support of the real best judgment of his supporters, and not the views of those who were currently renting the favorable views of his supporters. I regret to say that that effort was not widely successful.

Also, I noted that as years went by, most of the time I was there, Mobutu paid great attention to detail and really tried, by travel throughout the country, to build a stronger and more viable country for his citizenry. But I gather that more recently, as I've seen him on occasion when I've gone back or seen him here, I understand that he's paying less attention to detail. After all, he's been absolute ruler since 1965, and that's now 23 years.

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That's a long, long time to be busy seven-plus days a week and 24-plus hours a day. So it's understandable.

Currently, I think he has a pretty good Cabinet. He's delegating, in effect, authority to that Cabinet, and things seem to be going reasonably well.

Q: During your time beginning in 1969, the fevered pitch of our interest in Zaire had died down somewhat. Did you feel that the development of policy and, indeed, the carrying-out of policy was, in effect, being carried out basically between yourself and the Bureau of African Affairs? To what extent did you feel that you were able to develop and influence our policy there?

VANCE: I had the impression that high-level interest in the Congo was very fleeting in our government. Therefore, in effect, I was doing a lot of evolving of American policy towards the Congo myself, with the very excellent staff that I had working with me in Leopoldville. Although the backup of the African Bureau was always very friendly and very effective and very helpful, my old friend David Newsom was Assistant Secretary for a good part of this period, and our views on what should be done coincided almost invariably.

Q: One question I wanted to explore a bit with you in the earlier period we were talking about, and can apply, in fact, to both periods of time when you were intimately involved with Zaire, concerns the role of other agencies in the developing and carrying-out of our policy in Zaire. Would you like to comment on that?

VANCE: The problem that is faced by ambassadors, especially in countries where there is a very considerable presence of a variety of U.S. Government agencies and a large staff, is a problem for any given ambassador, and it has gotten worse over the years as management of foreign policy in Washington has become more and more difficult, with the explosion of different agencies, each of which thinks that its view of what should be done in a given country should predominate, and also the explosion of staff in the Congress

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and the great increase in the congressional impression and belief that each one of them is qualified to decide and announce American foreign policy.

This was beginning during my period in the Congo, but had not reached alarming proportions, I didn't think. I had the feeling that I had very little difficulty in coordinating the positions of activities of AID, CIA, USIA, and our military in the Congo. I was then, and now, convinced that it was because of my charm, but when I got back, after almost five years in the Congo, and found myself facing Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who informed me that my next assignment was to be his executive director in charge of coordinating all U.S. Government federal agencies abroad in the control of narcotics, I saluted, of course, and said, "Sir, I'll do whatever you tell me, but why me? I don't know anything about narcotics."

He said, "You are my favorite son of a bitch, and I mean to do something about it." He had apparently concluded that from my performance in Zaire. (Laughs)

Q: Did Kissinger take any active interest in Zaire while you were ambassador?

VANCE: No. I've forgotten the dates, but he was, of course, during virtually all of the time, at least, National Security Advisor to the President. Then he moved over to the State Department, and he kept both jobs for a short while, in effect, part of the time due to Brent Scowcroft's great ability with people.

I didn't think that Kissinger had a great interest, but what he had observed, he had apparently liked, because he stuck me with my most difficult assignment in my 35 years in the Foreign Service.

Q: Returning a moment to Zaire itself, the period while you were ambassador was a rather quieter period in terms of internal unrest, I think, than your earlier experience. Did you find that Zaire, while territorial integrity had been preserved, had advanced under Mobutu in terms of a nation state? Were the tribal divisions sufficiently still serious enough to be at

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least a threat? In other words, had Zaire evolved considerably from the very divisive period of time when you were there?

VANCE: It definitely had evolved. Mobutu continued to fear that there might be some threat especially from the Katanga. For that reason, for a long time he kept, in my opinion, an unwarranted suspicion of a senior tribal figure, a very able man, and who was twice foreign minister and twice charged by Mobutu with high treason. The first time, Mobutu caught him. That was while I was ambassador in Zaire. He was sentenced to death. I believe I made some contribution when I urged Mobutu, the next time I saw him, just talking alone, that it would make a very unfortunate impression if the execution was carried out. In fact, it was commuted to life imprisonment, then it was commuted to enforced residence in his native village, and then the next thing we knew, he was foreign minister again. He later became prime minister.

I think that by the time I left Zaire in 1974, the Zairians were basically regarding themselves as Zairians. Certainly there were older Zairians who still regarded themselves in a tribal way, like we in the United States think of ourselves—in my case, from Minnesota. There are still local loyalties. I think that, on the whole, they've done an excellent job of building a nation.

Q: Mobutu, of course, had consolidated power in himself and, as you mentioned, was a very strong leader. Had he retained some of the cast of characters of the period of time when you first became involved with Zaire, such people as Justin (Inaudible), or had they disappeared entirely from the scene?

VANCE: Mobutu was particularly close to him at the beginning, and he continued to be foreign minister for a period of time, including the beginning of my sojourn as ambassador. But then they had a falling-out, and he withdrew to his native province up river, and now he's become a private businessman. This is what has happened to move of the original characters, but not all.

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Mobutu continued to work with most of them for quite a period of time, and some of them are still with him. For example, his leading financial advisor while I was there and governor of the national bank, Jules Sabwa, is now, I believe, prime minister.

Q: By and large, I may be overstating the case a little bit, Zaire has more often than not supported us in interests elsewhere in the world. That is, their vote in the U.N., for example, relatively speaking, anyway, has been more with us than, say, the socialist or communist world. Was there a reason for that? Was Mobutu naturally conservative? What do you think?

VANCE: I think both. He was naturally conservative, but also his great friend at every stage of his life had been the United States. So it's a natural outcome of that.

Q: Did Mobutu ever try to play the United States off against Belgium?

VANCE: Oh, often! That's really the favorite outdoor sport throughout the whole period. I referred earlier to the love-hate relationship between the Congolese, the Zairians, and the Belgians. I understand that there's currently a great breakdown in the relationships due to something that someone said in Belgium. I haven't heard all the details. It was at a high level, and it just infuriated the Congolese, the Zairians, and they almost stopped talking to each other. But it is still to be noted that whenever a Zairian leader's child is ready to go to the university, if he can arrange it, he arranges to send the child to Belgium to study. That's where they travel on vacation. The Belgians continue, of course, to take enormous interest in the Congo, because many, many Belgian families have had members who lived in the Congo, so they are very well informed about Congolese developments and follow this very closely.

Q: Mobutu, at least in Western eyes, did one or two bizarre things which I'd like you to comment on. For example, there was a time when he changed his own name. He also

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proscribed certain holidays that he decided would no longer be celebrated. Could you comment on this aspect of Mobutu?

VANCE: Even before I arrived in Zaire, when I was still in Chad, Mobutu had launched a program of Africanization of place names and people's names, and even of dress. He abandoned the coat and tie of Western Europe, and wore what really looks like a Nehru jacket, with either a scarf or no shirt at all, nothing behind the V-neck of the jacket. He called it # bas coats, which is “down with coats” in French. He wore a leopard-skin hat shaped like the overseas hat of our World War I uniform. As you indicated, they changed the place names and personal names, all of which had been chosen by the Belgian colonials. He persuaded President Tombalbaye of Chad to bring these things about. The latter explained to me that his capital city was called Fort Lamy, named after a French explorer, and the second biggest city was called Fort Archambault, and he said, “Neither of them is a fort. Why in the world should we keep those names?” So he changed them to the capital of N'Djamena.

Mobutu even changed the name of the river, the Congo River. It's called the Zaire in the Zaire. He claimed that the Congo tribe that inhabited—and still inhabits—the mouth of the Congo River, when they were found there when the first Portuguese arrived in the continent, he said they called this river “Zaire,” which means “the river” in the Congolese tribal language. He said, “Being primarily a Catholic country, all of us have Christian first names named after the Christian saints. What in the world have we got to do with Saint this and Saint that? Joseph! I'm Joseph, which is the husband of the Virgin Mary, which seems a strange name for a Congolese to have.” So he changed his name to Sese Seko, and it goes on to maybe 15 or 20 more words that describe him.

All of them changed their names by his orders, all of the Congo, except his wife. Her name was Marie Antoinette, and she obviously was damned if she was going to give up Marie Antoinette and take on an African name. Yet the press and the radios could not continue to

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call her Marie Antoinette, so from that moment on, she was always referred to as “Mama Mobutu.”

Q: What about the holidays?

VANCE: Oh, yes. He had a great falling-out with the Catholic Church and banned the use of all Christian holidays, including Christmas briefly. That's nonsense now.

I had a very amusing encounter with the Catholic archbishop in Zaire. He finally became a cardinal—Cardinal Malulu. He was complaining to me during this real breach between Mobutu and the church. He was complaining to me, and I said, “But your church is responsible for Mobutu having reached the position he has reached.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Well,” I said, “I've been told by Congolese and even confirmed by Mobutu that he attended a church school up river, and the church had a rule at the time that if a student who had been so fortunate as to be accepted into a church school, had the nerve to misbehave to the extent of visiting that den of sin and iniquity called Leopoldville without proper authorization of his teachers, he was immediately dismissed from school and put in the Army as a private. I've been told that that is how Mobutu got into the Force Publique.”

My partner in the conversation looked aghast and changed the subject. (Laughs)

Q: You mentioned Mobutu's adopting a leopard-skin hat. I believe it's correct to say that you have such a hat. How did you acquire that, Mr. Ambassador?

VANCE: It's one of my cherished possessions that was given to me by what's referred to in French as le guy. It was after I had been decorated with the Order of the Commander of the Leopard. I was instructed by the president that whenever I wore that decoration, I

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should wear the hat, whether it be indoors or outdoors. Once in a while I do so. Not often. (Laughs)

Q: Looking back now on your close to five-year tour as ambassador in Zaire, what gives you most satisfaction?

VANCE: I think the degree of success that we had and the United States had in that period in helping the Congolese leadership create a nation. It certainly was not a total success, but as developing countries in Africa go, it is certainly not amongst the worst. That is a source of satisfaction. As I said today in this interview, I put a lot of years off and on, either directly or indirectly, into Zaire. It's been very interesting. I think I've been lucky to have had that much association over a 35-year career with one country. I guess that doesn't often happen. I also feel similarly close to Belgium for the same reasons. We still have very good Belgian friends who we see from time to time, who visit us, and we visit them.

At one point when I was ambassador to Zaire, we were returning for home leave, I think, and I decided that I would see if it were convenient for one of my closest Belgian friends for us to visit him and his wife. So I communicated with him before I sought permission from the Department of State. I also had to seek concurrence from my counterpart, the American Ambassador to Belgium, so I wouldn't appear to be "poaching" in his preserves. My great friend, Pierre Harmel, happened to be prime minister of Belgium at the time. I did not convey that to young Mr. Eisenhower, who was son of President Eisenhower, our ambassador to Belgium. Toward the end of our communication, he seemed rather reluctant to concur, and I had trouble getting his attention in the telegrams, asking if he concurred. Then when I finally told him who I would be visiting, I got approval.

We were entertained for a drink at the residence, and I don't think he was terribly amused by the fact that I told him, when our plane door opened when we landed in Brussels, that at the foot of the steps was the prime minister, who put us in his car to take us to his house. (Laughs)

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Pierre Harmel is a great person, and we got to know him very well when we were assigned in Brussels. We arrived right after the war, and he had been Minister of Education in a Catholic government that had just been defeated. He was in the opposition. I got to know him I've forgotten how, and we became very close friends. The only way to make friends with very, very senior people is when they're not senior. He was delighted. I arranged for him, in fact, to have a Leader Grant tour of the United States. By coincidence, Jean and I and our children returned on the SS America from home leave, and discovered that Pierre Harmel was on the same ship. So we sat together at meals all the way across. We and the Harmels have been very close. Their older son came and stayed with us for a while in Washington, and we still communicate.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I now would like to get to your time in Ethiopia, which was from 1962 to 1966, where you were deputy chief of mission. That was a period of time when Ethiopia was a very different Ethiopia in many ways from what it is today. Haile Selassie was still emperor. The old feudal system of Ethiopia was still in pretty much full flower, much of which has disappeared now since the revolution of 1974. I wonder if you could tell us your impressions of Ethiopia at the time and your relations, if any, or at least your impressions of Haile Selassie.

VANCE: I think that the period of time that we were in Ethiopia is one of the most difficult for me to analyze as to what did we do wrong or what went wrong. Shortly after we left, it fell apart and was taken over by the disaster known as the derg.

I was in Ethiopia the four years. As I said earlier, I was chargé d'affaires between ambassadors at the beginning, so at the beginning I got to know the emperor on a personal basis. Because I speak French and he spoke French and Amharic, period, full stop with him—he spoke almost no English—I was able to communicate and talk to him directly without an interpreter, which most Americans are not able to do if they didn't know French.

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He had decided, after he was returned to his country by the British after the war, that he would have to make strenuous efforts to modernize his country, and he ruled, among other things, that education for the future would be in English, not in Amharic, so that his educated people could communicate with the rest of the world more easily.

He said also that public education would be pressed. Before the Italian occupation, education had been entirely in the hands of the Coptic Church, and it was said that there were many Coptic Church teachers who believed still that the earth was flat and other wonderful bits of intellectualism of that nature. As I look back on my four years in Ethiopia, that man dragged his country kicking and screaming out of the cave age.

What happened? He regarded the United States as his greatest friend, and we supplied his prime minister with a legal advisor. The second one was there when we were there, Donald Parradis. We helped them draft a modern constitution which envisaged a Parliament with two houses, which would have a general election, have public participation in the elections. The emperor would appoint a prime minister, there would be a Cabinet, and it all looked like Thomas Jefferson had been at work.

However, looking back on it, the emperor, I should add, although very friendly to me personally and to close foreign friends, people he regarded as close friends, he really was God in the eyes of his people. I've been standing with him and have seen reasonably senior Ethiopians come up and prostrate themselves flat on the floor in front of him.

Although he was 70 years old when we arrived, I certainly can attest to his good health and strenuous physical capacities, because he would frequently go on inspection tours of this, that, and the other thing, and the diplomatic corps would be invited. I was very considerably younger than he, but I would get out of breath trying to keep up with him at that altitude. He just practically ran, almost a dog trot, as he conducted these inspections. There was certainly nothing senile about him during my period. He was so interested in education and expanding the public schools, that he leapt at the possibility of having a

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large Peace Corps contingency. We sent 600 Peace Corps volunteers to Ethiopia, which was at the very beginning of the Peace Corps, and it practically doubled the faculty of the secondary schools in Ethiopia. So we should not be astonished that we instilled a lot of ideas and ideals that were very strange to then feudal Ethiopia in the youth that was growing up at the time. We helped him open Haile Selassie University, funded it, supplied teachers, and started turning out these highly educated young people.

We did not realize how really, totally, 1000% feudal the old man was. He simply was not about to delegate anything to anybody. We used to joke that he decided whether to put a 25-cent stamp on any letter that left the government, or a 50-cent stamp. His unfortunate son kept on being absolutely nothing but Crown Prince on and on and on, until he finally had a nervous breakdown and became a vegetable. He went to Switzerland.

I'm told that finally what happened was the emperor became senile and lost control of what was happening. I can't understand it. What happened was, he lived too long. If he had tried to use the educated, trained youth and the structure in the government. We talked him into land control and land reform, brought in airplanes to map the country so that people would know who owned what, rather than just the dukes and their equivalents owning everything in sight from the mountaintop. It all fell apart. I think it all fell apart because he lived too long, and people got fed up with the crap. It was just very sad to look back at that period.

We were able to drive everywhere in Ethiopia. They had an agricultural advisory structure that was supported by an agricultural college and high school that we'd founded, that had county agents helping the farmers throughout Ethiopia. This was the country that was the breadbasket of the Middle East, and now everybody's starving to death. It's just an extremely sad view.

Q: Later it became fashionable to echo what you've just been saying, that the emperor was no longer able to keep up with developments toward modernization, if that's the right word,

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in Ethiopia. That failure was one of the direct causes of the revolution that took place in 1974. Another was supposedly his failure to recognize the seriousness of the famine that had occurred just before that.

Were you able to recognize in the period of time that you were there, 1962 to 1966, the trend that would develop later on, or did that come later?

VANCE: I think it came later, because we kept being asked by Washington to report on how we would appraise the possibility of a revolution, and there didn't appear to be any signs of one coming up. I think we probably weren't wise enough to see the slippage of the training or the creation of all these hopeful young people. We saw the form of government that they had, but it was never used. We should have seen that this was headed for a dust-up, but we didn't. I think it started after that.

There had been a coup, but it was an in-house, in-palace coup. The bodyguard and police chiefs were, regrettably, the emperor's brothers, and the two of them pulled off a coup while he was traveling aboard. But that was an in-house coup within the feudal system, so that there were no signs that we detected.

Q: There was a considerable American presence in Ethiopia while you were there, specifically in Asmara, where we maintained a fair-sized base. Is that fair enough?

VANCE: Yes, absolutely, and we had a very large MAAG, military advisory group, a large AID mission, a large aid program. As I indicated earlier, we had an enormous Peace Corps contingent and advisors in the government of Ethiopia. An American advisor was in the office of the prime minister, with an open door to the emperor.

I remember something that should have tipped me off, I guess, during one of my early calls on him when I was charged after I arrived. We used to get telegrams from Washington that would start out, "You will make clear to HIM (His Imperial Majesty): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5." I went over to deliver one of those. Of course, I tried to put it forward more diplomatically.

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His Majesty interrupted me after I got started, and he said, "I want to assure you that we will always value highly the advice of our great friends, the Americans. But Mr. Charg# (this was all in French), would you mind telling me when you were born?"

I said, "I was born, Your Majesty, January 18, 1917."

"Oh," said His Majesty, "that's just about a year after I became regent. What were you saying, Mr. Charg#?" (Laughs) In other words, "Drop dead. You guys don't know what you're talking about."

Q: Ethiopia, of course, was the one African nation that had not ever really been colonized. The Italians tried to do it at the end of the 19th century. They really only occupied it in the late thirties. There were some evidences of Italian presence there, particularly the roads the Italians had created. Was there any other foreign presence there of consequence while you were there?

VANCE: No, I don't think so, not of significance. The Italian roads were certainly evident, the great road building of the descendants of Rome. We helped the Ethiopians maintain them by bringing advisors from our highway departments, and we enlarged road systems and helped maintain the ones in existence. As I indicated earlier, I drove over most of the corner of Ethiopia during that four years. The main road system was made open at every corner.

We had even American Protestant missionaries, strangely enough, in a country headed by the emperor, who was the defender of the faith of the Coptic Church. There were probably other national missionaries. There was a major one in southwestern Ethiopia whose followers extended over the border into southern Sudan, and this caused a certain amount of problems.

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Q: Just before your arrival in 1962, a year or so, the beginnings of the Eritrean separatist movement had taken place, a movement that's still going on. Was that an issue between us and the emperor at the time?

VANCE: No. We were involved from the very beginning, from the early stirrings of that Eritrean movement, because one of our mapping planes made a forced landing out in the boondocks of Eritrea, and the crew was seized. We had quite a long negotiation getting them released. It was a little awkward because we were negotiating with the ELF and the emperor.

Q: There was another province that also became concerned with separatism, namely Tigre. Perhaps you'd like to comment on that.

VANCE: Yes. I indicated earlier that we would periodically be questioned by Washington about the prospect of a rebellion. I had become personally friendly with the then chief of staff of the Ethiopian Government, General Yassou. One night after a small party at our house, at which General Yassou had been present, he stayed on for a nightcap. I asked him about it. I said, "From where you sit, General, do you see any threats of rebellion?" He referred to some rather minor flare-ups at the time with the Eritreans, but he said, "That's about all."

Laughingly, I said, "General, if you see a threat coming along that you think is likely to succeed, my personal advice to you would be join it and lead it, because if there's going to be one that succeeds, we might have someone like you heading it." He patted his big tummy and laughed back at me and said, "Look, Mr. Vance, I have no intention of undertaking anything as physically strenuous as that." Well, let me remind you that General Yassou is the deputy leader of the Eritrean rebellion going on right now. He certainly doesn't have a big tummy at this point.

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The Tigrenian rebellion was headed by President Ras Tafari, who is the head of the Tigre House in the Imperial Dynasty. The Imperial, in Ethiopian history, had been in competition with the House that Haile Selassie belonged to. However, in the time we had come along, peace had been restored. They named the governor general of Tigre, he was given one of the emperor's granddaughters, Princess Aida, as his wife. We visited them in the capital of Tigre with Sam and Mary Gammon, when Sam was consul general in Asmara. Tigre was part of the Asmara consulate district.

I have seen him twice here in Washington in the last year or so, because he and his son were invited by Mary and Sam Gammon, and just six of us went to the Gammon apartment. Sam suggested that if I had any slides of that visit, I should bring them. I brought them and our projector, then showed him and his son slides of their home in the great old days. Aida had been arrested and incarcerated with her mother and other female members of the royal house for years at that point, so these pictures brought tears.

Since then, I've been told and have seen in the newspaper that the royal ladies have been released from prison. But the second time I saw him was just about two or three weeks ago. I asked him where Aida was, and he said, "I don't know. They were released, and I haven't heard any more about it."

I asked him the first time whether he and the ELF were coordinating their efforts of rebellion, and he said, "Yes, we were. I told the ELF I would be prepared to work out appropriate arrangements, if we won."

Q: Ethiopia has been known as one of the poorest countries in the world in such things as gross national product or average per capita gross national product, this despite the relative affluence of the royal family and the upper class. Since you were able to travel virtually anywhere you wished to go in Ethiopia, was this apparent?

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VANCE: All of the villages, of course, were rather primitive, but nowhere did we sense a lack of adequate food. It was an agricultural country. They seemed to be sustaining a subsistence level, better than a subsistence level, of life. In big cities, there were beggars all over the place, but abject poverty is too strong a word to describe most of what we saw. Certainly no villages were prosperous, but they seemed to be getting along.

Q: Famine was reportedly one of the things that led to the revolution in 1974, more specifically the fact that Haile Selassie and his government were either unwilling or unable to recognize the seriousness of the famine that had taken place just before. Yet our own aid mission had, for some years, urged him to concentrate on agricultural matters. In terms of what you were saying earlier about Haile Selassie, I wonder whether that made sense, in the sense that he was not able to recognize that this was going to be a problem, even though famine had been endemic in Ethiopia for centuries.

VANCE: Famine had been endemic due to climatic up and downs, particularly in the north and west. But I've heard the story that there was this famine in central Ethiopia, and he should certainly have noted that and done something about it, and could have, because he had coped with it earlier in such outbreaks. I think he was beginning to lose touch because he was too old, I guess.

Q: You served in Ethiopia as DCM for essentially non-career ambassadors. How did you find your relationship with them?

VANCE: My first ambassador lasted only two weeks, and he was a career man. Then the only other one was Korry, who was not career. Korry was of a journalistic background. Korry tended to leave the running of the embassy and the mission as a whole to me, except for the most important political issues, dealing with the emperor and the prime minister. That he very jealously kept to himself. We got along reasonably well. Korry's ego is pretty enormous, and he did not think that anybody else could be very bright or very capable, but he was willing to leave the sort of nuts-and-bolts management of the

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mission to me. Rather to my surprise, when I left, I learned that he had raved about me in his efficiency reports, which led to my being considered as having an ambassador assignment.

He then was assigned to Chile, where he sort of went off his rocker, because he was just obsessed with demonstrating that he had no part of overthrowing Allende Gossens. He just spent the rest of his life trying to prove that and became almost unbalanced.

Q: He was the same Korry, was he not, who was later identified, or maybe during your period, with a rather elaborate thesis on aid?

VANCE: Oh, yes. That was during my time. He was called back to head up the committee that studied how we should reorganize our aid programs in Africa, and he came up with the idea that there were 50-odd independent countries, and there was a great waste of administrative talent and money running a separate aid mission in each one of these, and a separate aid mission should be continued only for bigger countries, and the smaller ones should have regional programs.

When I was selected to go to Chad as ambassador, which was one of the smaller ones and no longer had an aid mission, a friend of mine asked me how I expected to be successful dealing with the Chadian Government when I didn't have an aid program. I said, "Well, if an American ambassador could not get the attention of his chief of state with or without an aid program, he ought to be sent back to kindergarten." Anyway, it was an interesting approach. I think there was some merit, perhaps, to it.

Q: I take it from your remarks that living was reasonably comfortable in Ethiopia during the time you were there.

VANCE: Very. We had a very pleasant house, which I think you're familiar with. We had a good staff of servants, and we had a very interesting and able group of colleagues. The Ethiopians were friendly, and we enjoyed that period.

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Q: I'm sure now, however, there must be an element of sadness with regard to your time in Ethiopia, because surely some of the people with whom you had contact or associated with among the Ethiopians . . .

VANCE: Are dead.

Q: Are either dead as a result of the revolution or in exile.

VANCE: In exile. Exactly. It is very sad. We run into from time to time our friends the Rosenfelds. Chris Rosenfeld was the PAO when we were there. He was instrumental in organizing an association known as Friends of Ethiopia, and everybody reminisces about the great old days and the horrors that have befallen the country now. It is sad.

Q: I think that will conclude our interview today. I want to express my very deep appreciation to Ambassador Vance for a rather lengthy interview, which I found most stimulating and most interesting. We do appreciate it, Sheldon, and thank you very much.

VANCE: My pleasure. It was great fun.

End of interview